

VZCZCXRO9642
OO RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHLB #1497/01 2941505
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 201505Z OCT 08
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3312
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3051
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3262
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 05 BEIRUT 001497

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR A/S HOOK AND PDAS WARLICK
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/MCDERMOTT
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/SCHEDLBAUER
OSD FOR EDELMAN/LONG/STRAUB/DALTON
JOINT STAFF FOR RANK/GARAVANTA
CENTCOM FOR ALLARDICE/MACLEAN/PADDOCK
DIA FOR LARSON/CRONIN/KRAUSE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/07/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [MCAP](#) [MARR](#) [IR](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: INAUGURAL JOINT MILITARY COMMISSION

REF: BEIRUT 1449

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) MinDef Elias Murr and ASD for International Security Policy Mary Beth Long chaired the inaugural U.S.-Lebanon Joint Military Commission (JMC) October 6. Murr opened the session by warmly welcoming the U.S. delegation and expressing his deep gratitude for U.S. assistance, especially during the ongoing financial difficulties in the United States. Murr outlined the Lebanese defense policy for the delegation and reaffirmed his strong commitment to strong bilateral ties between the United States and Lebanon. Murr expressed the view that there should be no limit on Lebanon's capacity to fight terror and, therefore, there should be no veto on assistance to Lebanon. He informed the delegation that the LAF was meeting with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) that same day, October 6, without the participation by UNIFIL, and would convey to the IDF that the JMC would benefit Israel as well as Lebanon. Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander General Jean Kahwagi seconded Murr's positions and stressed that the LAF needs to increase its capabilities, modernize, and transform into a modern army as quickly as possible. Kahwagi also provided an update on the deployment of Syrian troops to the northern Lebanese border (Septel, Beirut 1449). Assistant Secretary Mary Beth Long told Murr that the U.S. shares the same goals as the Lebanese Army and that we must work towards sustainable and viable solutions for the LAF that will produce results in six to eight months. The topic of AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters was discussed. Both sides agreed to an inspection of the Cobras in Jordan. At the conclusion of the JMC, both sides signed a Defense Cooperation Framework (DCF) and released a joint press statement (see text para 15). End summary.

2. (SBU) The DOD-State Joint Military Commission team first visited Minister of Defense Elias Murr at his office in Yarze on Monday, October 6 for an executive session. Also present in the meeting was the LAF Commander, General Jean Kahwagi. U.S. members of the JMC attending the meeting were Ambassador Sison; Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Mary Beth Long; Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Political Military Affairs Frank Ruggiero; Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for NEA David Hale; ARCENT Commander Lieutenant General James Lovelace, CENTCOM J-5 Major General Robert Allardice; Joint Staff J-5 Brigadier General Ralph Baker; and Defense Attache.

OPENING REMARKS BY MINDEF -
THANKFUL FOR CONTINUED US ASSISTANCE

3. (C) Murr opened the meeting by noting his appreciation of the continued U.S. support in light of the current financial environment. MinDef Murr stressed the importance of the JMC for Lebanon as it is the first agreement at the political level between the Lebanese Army and the United States. While stressing the historic nature of the JMC, Murr also cautioned us that the message from the JMC should be that "we are not making a movie," implying that that the JMC had to produce other results besides speeches and scripts. ASD Long seconded

this idea saying, "Yes, we cannot be seen as all talk and no action."

MANY MEDIA DISCUSSIONS ON HELICOPTERS
MURR SAYS HE DOES NOT RESPOND TO THEM

14. (C) Murr explained to ASD Long that there has been much speculation in the local media recently regarding the acquisition of attack helicopters for the LAF. Murr said that he has not responded to these reports because it is more

BEIRUT 00001497 002 OF 005

important to send a different message concerning U.S. support. Specifically, Murr wants to send the message that the U.S. will support the LAF without a political quid pro quo requiring the LAF to back the U.S. in regional security operations. (Comment: While this could be seen as a reference to U.S. missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is much more likely that Murr was referring to support for Israel against Hizbollah. End Comment.)

LEBANESE DEFENSE POLICY DEFINED

15. (C) Murr quickly moved to explain that the LAF is already assisting the United States by conducting its assigned missions in Lebanon such as fighting terrorism and supporting UNSCR 1701. "Our policy is a free Lebanon, a unified Lebanon; we will protect (UNSCR) 1701, Lebanese borders, Lebanese civilians, and fight terrorism," said Murr. While stating that the LAF has already been conducting these missions, Murr was quick to remind us that "we are at the beginning of this battle and it is important that we don't (speak past) each other today."

THERE CAN BE NO VETO FROM ISRAEL
WHILE WE ARE FIGHTING TERRORISM

16. (C) The MinDef became quite forceful when describing the task of fighting terrorism. "There can be no limits on fighting terror. There can be no veto because of any country like Israel over support for the LAF. We have heard about this veto in the media," said Murr. Murr went on to stress a need for a media campaign to dispel reports that Israel has the final veto over support to the LAF.

MEETING BETWEEN THE LAF AND IDF

17. (C) Murr informed us that there was a meeting taking place in Naqoura, Lebanon between LAF Officers and Israeli Defense Force Officers concurrently with the JMC meeting. He said that the meeting was being held outside of the tri-partite process that normally includes UNIFIL participation (Naqoura is the site of UNIFIL's headquarters). Murr related that the purpose of this meeting was to inform the Israelis that the JMC in Beirut was for their benefit as well as for the benefit of Lebanon. Murr also said that his officers would inform the Israelis that they do not get a veto over Lebanese Army relations with the United States.

18. (C) "I know Israel has a problem with Hizbollah. I did not create this problem," Murr said, asserting that "we pay the price" for the 2006 Hezbollah-Lebanese war. Murr continued by reminding us that since 1943, no equipment given to the LAF has ever been given to another organization such as Hizbollah. ASD Long responded saying, "You have a perfect accountability record. Not other army in the region can say that."

GENERAL KAHWAGI WELCOMES THE DELEGATION,
STRESSES NEED FOR CAPABILITIES OVER EQUIPMENT

19. (C) Kahwagi, in his first meeting with a foreign delegation since being named LAF Commander, came straight to the point. "I don't want to ask you for lists of equipment. Our main mission is to fight terrorism, defend the borders, and help the people of Lebanon. It is for these reasons that I need to modernize and transform the army to accomplish these tasks," said Kahwagi. Kahwagi re-emphasized that he does not want to focus on equipment lists, but he also reminded us that he is receiving much pressure, both privately and in the media, concerning his relationship with the USG. Kahwagi told us that these attacks essentially accuse him of working with the Americans but getting no real

BEIRUT 00001497 003 OF 005

help from them. "We need to show (these people) that we will have a modern army," said Kahwagi.

ASD LONG OPENING REMARKS:
WE HAVE THE SAME GOALS

110. (C) ASD Long opened her remarks by saying that "these are our same goals." She also assured MinDef Murr that the U.S.-Lebanon defense relationship is not related to the ongoing financial crisis in the United States as it is an enduring relationship that has an enduring commitment to the LAF. ASD Long asked ARCENT Commander LTG Lovelace and CENTCOM J-5 MG Allardice to brief ARCENT and J-5 roles in Lebanon. LTG Lovelace explained that his command is committed to the Comprehensive Training Program (CTP) and that he looks forward to working with Embassy Beirut and the LAF to implement this program. Lovelace affirmed that the Acting CENTCOM Commander LTG Marty Dempsey and incoming CENTCOM Commander General David Petraeus have wholeheartedly endorsed this plan. Lovelace told Murr that, "we are anxious to help." MG Allardice seconded this desire to help the LAF. Allardice acknowledged that the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) process is frustrating, but he committed his staff to helping the LAF leverage the system to their benefit.

A TRULY HISTORIC OCCASION
THE FIRST COOPERATION SINCE 1983

111. (C) Murr reminded the JMC delegation of the deep ties between the U.S. Department of Defense and the LAF. He also recounted the dark days of the Syrian occupation of Lebanon where, "you could not see one U.S. officer at MoD." Murr remarked that this was the first time since 1983 that so many U.S. trainers would be in Lebanon to help the LAF (Note. In 1983, under the Lebanese Army Modernization Program (LAMP), U.S. Army Brigadier General Marty Fintel opened an Office of Military Cooperation at LAF HQ in Yarze. The LAMP program saw upwards of 200 U.S. soldiers on the ground in Lebanon as the entire LAF was transformed from a French colonial militia to a heavy U.S. Infantry Brigade structure. This training also included extensive training by U.S. Special Forces in the Bekaa Valley which resulted in the creation of the five LAF Intervention Regiments. All of these structures remain until this day with little modernization having occurred in the intervening twenty-five year period. The LAMP training mission was completely independent from the Marine Corps' participation in the Multi-National Force in Beirut during this same period. End Note.)

DEFENSE COOPERATION FRAMEWORK

112. (C) Murr told ASD Long and the delegation that he had presented the question of his signing the Defense Cooperation Framework (DCF) to the cabinet but the cabinet had taken no action. He said that he and Kahwagi would take sole responsibility for the document. Murr claimed that signing this document without the cover of the full cabinet posed a great political risk for him and for Kahwagi. Murr said that they needed cover from the U.S. Explaining that the JMC was Kahwagi's first meeting with any European or Arab delegation, Murr stressed that Kahwagi cannot afford to suffer from political "overload." The DCF cannot be seen as only a political agreement between the U.S. and Lebanon, but it must also produce strong technical support as well. Murr gave a somber prediction if the DCF is not successful in showing the Lebanese that "the ways of old (Syria) were not helpful. I will lose politically; Kahwagi will lose militarily; and the whole program will fall down." (Note: See the end of this cable for the full text of this agreement. End Note.)

ASD LONG TO MINDEF
WE WILL WORK WITH YOU

BEIRUT 00001497 004 OF 005

113. (C) ASD Long acknowledged that there are many challenges in Lebanon that must be faced. Even so, we must look down the road six to eight months so that we, the USG, are able to deliver on expectations garnered from the DCF. ASD Long promised that OSD would go to Congress and brief them on the LAF's three and five year plans (septel) briefed during the JMC to ensure that Congress understood the LAF's requirements.

DISCUSSION TURNS TO HELICOPTERS
AGREEMENT REACHED ON INSPECTION

114. (C) As one of the last topics covered, ASD Long presented a discussion on the way forward for helicopters for the LAF. ASD Long explained that there were several commercial options available to the LAF for short-term solutions. Kahwagi said that he did not want to introduce another aviation system into his inventory for a short term acquisition saying, "we don't need more problems." Murr said that both he and Kahwagi wanted to pursue the option of the AH-1 Cobra helicopters in Jordan. ASD Long stressed her strong reservations about the Cobras because of sustainability

issues. Even so, Murr said that he wanted to proceed with assessing the helicopters saying, "This will be nice to announce. We want to say that an LAF team will go to Jordan to make a report to the LAF Commander." Kahwagi then said, "I will send a team and if they are not supportable, maybe we can ask for UH-60 Blackhawks." All sides agreed that an assessment of the Jordanian Cobras should be the next step. Murr closed this topic echoing Kahwagi's comment that if the assessment comes back negative, then the LAF will then look for other options.

UNITED STATES - LEBANON
DEFENSE COOPERATION FRAMEWORK

15. (C) The Lebanese Ministry of Defense and U.S. Department of Defense are pleased to renew the cooperative relationship that has characterized U.S. - Lebanon relations for over fifty years. The Joint Military Commission (JMC) was the instrument of the renewal of our defense relationship. The 2008 JMC is the first in what will be an annual series of meetings between our defense establishments. The Lebanese Ministry of Defense and the U.S. Department of Defense are determined to strengthen their cooperative ties. Going forward, elements of our relationship will include:

Training - The multi-year Comprehensive Training Program will enable us to strengthen the capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and to construct a national training facility for the LAF. Additional Joint Combined Exchange Training will help us build upon existing training cooperation, focused on sophisticated skill sets. Increased IMET-funded programs will foster enduring ties between our military services.

Foreign Military Sales - The U.S. Department of Defense supports the LAF's requirements for equipment appropriate to the LAF's unique mission. The Department of Defense will be receptive to LAF requests for future assistance and will work closely with the LAF to jointly determine the best solutions to the LAF's requirements.

Funding - The U.S. Department of Defense will endeavor to find a predictable, reliable funding stream to support LAF modernization.

Absorption Capacity and Force Transformation - Both the Lebanese Defense Ministry and U.S. Department of Defense will work to expand to the LAF's ability to plan and conduct its modernization.

BEIRUT 00001497 005 OF 005

Promoting Lebanese Sovereignty: As Lebanese President Michel Sleiman stated in his inaugural speech, the LAF has increasingly gained the confidence of the Lebanese people, starting with its deployment to the South and in its defeat of terrorists at Nahr al-Bared. The U.S. Department of Defense looks forward to helping President Sleiman achieve his objective of promoting Government of Lebanon sovereignty over Lebanese territory. The U.S. Department of Defense recognizes the historic, unifying, and vital role of the LAF in promoting national security and combating terrorism. A strong LAF is essential to extending the authority of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory to ensure the Government is the sole political and military authority in the country.

Signed, 6 OCT 2008

For the U.S., ASD Long

For Lebanon, MinDef Murr

End text.

16. (C) Assistant Secretary Long has cleared this cable.
SISON